

US FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE – SOUTHWEST REGION
HURRICANE RITA UPDATE AS OF September 24, 2005 – 1400 HOURS MDST

NEW ITEMS OF SIGNIFICANCE:

Until further notice Central Command briefings and phone calls between the Regional Office and Field Stations will continue daily beginning at 0830 and 0900 respectively.

Project leaders and supervisors reporting in on today's call relayed that their employees were accounted for and safe.

Ralph Godfrey's FWS Type-3 Incident Command Team is staged temporarily at Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge. Tomorrow the team will move to Anahuac NWR, which will become the Incident Command Post. Team personnel are being dispatched within the hardest hit areas to assess damage to Service facilities and a quick response community assistance team has been dispatched to Chambers County.

Facilities west of Houston appear to be okay. McFaddin, Anahuac and Texas Point National Wildlife Refuges located southeast of Houston were closest to the area of landfall as was the Clear Lake Ecological Services Office. Damage assessment has not been completed. Water surge took out a weather station at McFaddin. Trinity River NWR was also hard hit sustaining 90 MPH winds, which knocked out power.

Gas shortages, downed power lines and trees and phone outages will impact the area for some time. Rainfall extremes causing flooding may impact facilities as far north as Oklahoma. Tornadoes are likely to occur throughout the final path of Rita.

Chambers and Jefferson counties appear to be the hardest hit. Chamber's county officials asked for assistance in debris removal, search and rescue operations and law enforcement support.

The majority of the Region's facilities will reopen on Monday – employees west of landfall are returning to their homes. No injuries have been reported.

Refuges and fish hatcheries not impacted by the storm are ready to provide equipment, supplies and personnel support as needed.

Tentatively, the Region may conduct a coastal flyover sometime next week.

All personnel support, boats, vehicles, equipment and supplies will be requested and assigned through the system. Staging of additional teams is being considered.

INFORMATION ACCESS:

INTERNET:

Anyone seeking information on Hurricane Rita may do so via these Service links:

<http://www.fws.gov/southwest/> <http://www.fws.gov/>

THE SOUTHWEST REGION'S HURRICANE RITA EMERGENCY INFORMATION DESK:

Employees can now reach the Southwest Region's Command Center's Hurricane Rita

Emergency Information Desk by e-mail or text messaging at: hurricanerita@fws.gov

TELEPHONE:

The Emergency Information Desk is being staffed at the Regional Office through Sunday, September 25 -- hours of operation are from 0600 to 1800 daily. Initially the Desk is serving as a centralized communications base for all affected staff and offices and following landfall serve as a resource Dispatch Center.

***HURRICANE RITA EMERGENCY INFORMATION DESK PHONE NUMBER:
505-248-6508**

Employees may check for pre-recorded information on the hurricane by phoning the Region's 24-Hour Emergency Phone Line at:

***24-Hour Employee Emergency Hotline: 505-248-6543**

NOTE: Any media inquiries will be handled by External Affairs: 505-248-6911

Daily updates will be completed by COB each day and press releases issued as necessary.

END OF REPORT

Victoria Fox, External Affairs
Southwest Region - USFWS
Phone: 505-248-6455
Fax: 505-248-6915
Blackberry: 505-440-1936